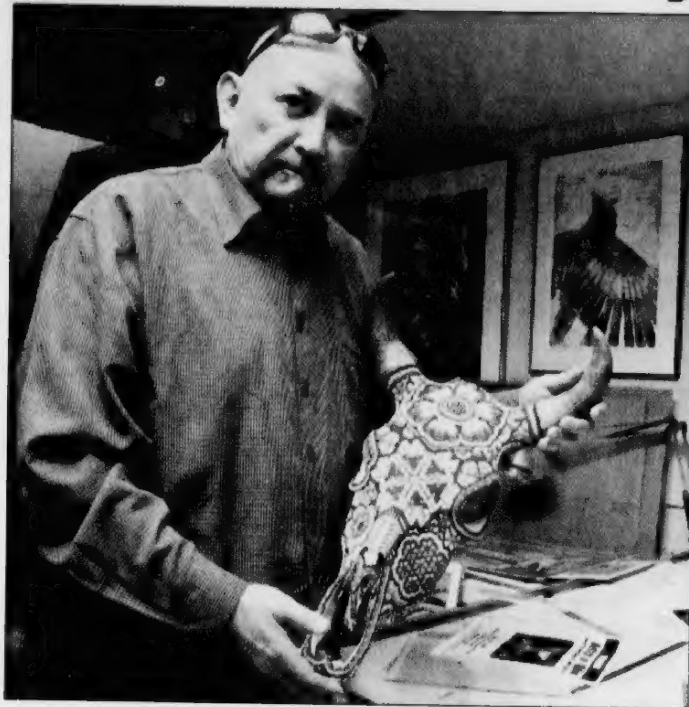


Coasting

Hawks hope to fly coop



Dancers to combine art and culture at benefit for new home

By AMANDA SCHOENBERG
OF THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

A flash of bright plumage, a pounding drum beat and twirling dancers — the omnipresent White Hawk Dancers have arrived.

The White Hawk Dancers bring their music, dance and drumming to everything from quinceañeras to peace protests to offer Watsonville a taste of Pre-Columbian tradition.

They are now asking the community for a little help.

The dancers are sponsoring the Artist of Olin — or movement, in the ancient Mexican language of Nahuatl — benefit art raffle on Saturday to help raise funds for the White Hawk Indian Council non-profit organization, with plans under way for an Ixtatutli Educational and Cultural Arts Center in the Pajaro Valley.

The raffle will include the work of more than 50 mostly Californian artists, with pieces ranging from monotype prints by Santa Cruz-based artist Jane Reyes to abstracts by San Diego artist Armand Nuñez, as well as several indigenous-themed works by White Hawk Dancers founder and artist Yerno Aranda.

A public viewing will begin at 10 a.m., with a presentation by the White Hawk Dancers at noon and a drawing at 12:30 p.m. Raffle tickets cost \$150, while admission is free.

In addition to the drawing, an intricately beaded livestock skull, in the Huichol tradition, was donated by a San Diego dance group for a separate \$1 raffle.

Aranda, who began the group with his wife, Anai-i, in 1983, has big ideas for the Cultural Center. He hopes young people will be able to practice silversmithing, mural painting, pottery, theater and dancing on a minimum of 15 acres in the next 10 years.

The White Hawk Dancers have moved from place to place since 1983, starting out at the Veterans Hall and practicing in parks and schoolyards throughout Watsonville. They now practice on Tuesdays and Thursdays at H.A. Hyde Elementary School, and meet Saturdays at a practice space and ceremonial sweat lodge in Las Lomas.

The dancers are now searching for a home of their own.

"(The owners) have been fantastic, but we really need our own space. It's like we're pulling at the seams," Aranda said.

There are now 40-50 dancers, with as many as 60 in the summer, Aranda said. Participants range from 5 years old to middle-aged, and Aranda said he has watched many grow from children to adults with their own little dancers at their sides.

ABOVE: Watsonville artist Yerno Aranda shows an animal skull with intricate beading Tuesday in his Watsonville studio. The skull will be one of dozens of artworks raffled off at a benefit for the White Hawk Dancers Saturday.

RIGHT: This serigraph by Paul Botello of Los Angeles is one of several tantalizing artworks in the raffle.



Yerno Aranda
Register-Pajaronian

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"God, for us, it's a pleasure to share the dances," Aranda said with a smile.

The group's focus is to teach young people about the rich indigenous history and culture of Pre-Columbian Mexico. Aranda hopes to create a supportive family atmosphere for the group.

"Once you learn who you are, you feel better about yourself," he said. "The hope is that this is a deterrent to gang violence. I know we've turned around the lives of many young people."

Francisco Juarez-Cahue, an employment training counselor originally from Michoacan, Mexico, joined the group more than ten years ago as a way to reconnect with his cultural and spiritual roots.

"It seemed to be the one opportunity to get involved with our culture here locally," he said. "We don't just refer to it as entertainment or working out, we do it because it's a way of life for us."

Aranda caught the dancing bug in 1974 when he watched dancers below him while painting a mural on a scaffold. With a few friends, he began learning from Mexican dancer Florencio Yescas.

"For me, when I first heard that drum, it pulled me over there," Aranda said.

The Arandas were involved in the United Farm Workers protests and grape boycotts, and helped found Toltecas en Aztlan, a gathering of Chicano artists and activists in San Diego in 1968. They moved seamlessly from labor activism to cultural activities, Aranda said.

"It awakened me to my own self-identity," he said. "I started searching out labor imagery. I also realized



Yermo Aranda and Evelyn Bedolla, members of the White Hawk Dancers, teach fifth- and sixth-graders an ancient dance from Mexico last year at Watsonville Charter School of the Arts.

it takes a lot of people to really make changes. By chance, I met a muralist who exposed me to mural art — a whole new world."

He has since involved the dancers in many mural projects, with several in the works, including one on Stanford Street, and possibilities at Pajaro and E.A. Hall middle schools.

The group got its name while practicing at E.A. Hall. One day, a group of fourth- and fifth-graders spied a hawk outside the cafeteria. One boy pointed to the white plumage under the wings, and the White Hawk Dancers were born.

Aranda now leaves the teaching

to the younger members and helps with designing outfits and coordinating fund raising, while Anai-i is still an active dancer.

The group performs more than 30 ceremonial dances of ancient Mexico — "the dances Cortez saw when he came," Aranda said.

They have added several new dances in the past two years, including "ofrenda" (offering) and "maiz,"

which takes dancers through the steps of planting and growing corn.

The Artist of Olin raffle will take place Saturday at Pajaro Valley Community Health Trust, 85 Nielson St., in the building adjacent to Watsonville Community Hospital. For more information about the raffle or to join the White Hawk Dancers, call 768-7404.

